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THE  
LIFE AND CHARACTER  
OF  
**JOHN BROWN:**  
A SERMON

PREACHED AT THE  
**Wesleyan Methodist Church, Pittsburgh, Pa.**

**On Sunday Evening, December 4, 1859.**

**BY REV. JOHN GREGORY,**

**Pastor of the Church.**

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**Published by Request of the Congregation.**

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\* 1854, July 22.

John C. Hummer.  
(Cousin of Wm.)

## SERMON.

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“ALL THINGS HAVE I SEEN IN THE DAYS OF MY VANITY: THERE IS A JUST MAN THAT PERISHETH IN HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND THERE IS A WICKED MAN THAT PROLONGETH HIS LIFE IN HIS WICKEDNESS.” Ecclesiastes vii: 15.

THE subject chosen for this evening's discourse is one of rapidly-increasing interest and importance. A great event has transpired; greater in its significance and in its foreshadowings than any that have for many years past been inscribed upon the pages of the nation's history. The whole country—North, South, East, West—has been convulsed as with the throes of a mighty earthquake. Politicians of all grades have been forced to lose sight for a moment of their schemes and aspirations, and to look on in wonder at the strange drama passing before their eyes. Preachers, laying aside for a time their doctrinal disquisitions, have been constrained to give their views of the wondrous event which has so aroused the interest of their congregations. Lecturers, turning away from the inviting paths of poetry and fiction, have been induced to speak in plain and sober prose of the great “Lesson of the hour.” Soldiers, tired of the monotony of peace, and eager to prove their skill and valor in war, have hurried hither and thither, have marched and counter-marched; and military displays on a most extensive scale have been the order of the day. And the people, everywhere, of all ages, and sects, and colors, and conditions, have been absorbed in discussions, and disputes, and prophecies about a subject with which they feel themselves to be intimately concerned. In the camp and in the grove, in the Court and in the Meeting-House, in the market and in the work-shop, on the street and by the fireside, in every place has the momentous event been the all-absorbing topic of conversation.

And what is the cause of these innumerable discussions, this raging excitement, this intense anxiety to hear the latest news? Has a foreign army invaded our shores? Has the dreaded pestilence again made its appearance? Has some vast and populous city been suddenly destroyed by fire? No! None of these calamities have happened. What then? A MAN, a brave old man, a true-hearted, strong-nerved American citizen, with eighteen valiant followers, has, quite unexpectedly, invaded the great and ancient Commonwealth of Virginia! By the magic of his keen, glaring

eye, and by the vigor of his stout right arm, he has spell-bound two thousand chivalrous Southrons, has kept them at bay for twenty-four hours, and has, after a desperate struggle, only yielded at last to the horde of disciplined troops, which came rushing in from the surrounding towns in answer to the cries of the affrighted populace! But why, when the surviving invaders are sabred and secured, and the smoke of the battle has cleared away, why does the commotion amongst the terrified citizens still continue? Why should the panic spread over the whole of the Southern States, and the excitement rush throughout the land, gaining strength at every step? Has any claim been disputed? any darling object assailed? any species of "property" endangered? Yes! The "peculiar institution" has been greatly imperilled! Slavery, and not merely the Old Dominion, has been invaded! Dagon, the pet idol of the South, has been openly threatened with destruction; and the weak knees of the Philistines have smitten one against another, when the perils which fear and cowardice had conjured up, stood in dread array before them! "The great goddess Diana" has been openly despised, and the "the craft" by which their wealth was made has been in great danger of being "set at naught." That explains the mystery and the extent of the excitement!

"Though the structure of a tyrant's throne  
Rise on the necks of half the suffering world,  
*Fear* trembles in the cement; Prayers, and tears,  
And secret curses—sap its mouldering base,  
And steal the pillars of allegiance from it;  
Then, let a *single arm* but dare the sway,  
Headlong it turns, and drives upon destruction."

An honest, God-fearing old man, one who "loved righteousness and hated iniquity," had for many years noted the fact that a certain class of his fellow-creatures had, in an evil hour, "fallen among thieves." And, robbed of all their God-given rights and privileges, scarred and deformed at the will of their cruel task-masters, they found no deliverer to undertake their cause! The recreant Priests of the nation, intent on theological controversies, busied with trifles, but "omitting the weightier matters of the law—judgment, mercy and faith"—though they had seen again and again the sad condition of their wounded brethren, had "passed by on the other side." The herd of unfeeling Statesmen, anxious to mount to high office and to secure national plunder, and fearing to meddle with or denounce odious laws and shameful compromises, had also "passed by on the other side." And the plaintive, wailing cry of the bruised and stricken ones was echoed throughout the land. Then the sorrow of the old man was stirred within him; and "while he was musing the fire burned." He thought of his duty to his God, of his duty to his neighbor. And the question, "Who is my neighbor?" rang incessantly in his ears. Then, from the swelling tide

of human woes, and from the Throne of the Eternal, came bounding back the answer:

*"Thy neighbor? It is he whom thou  
Hast power to aid and bless;  
Whose aching heart and burning brow  
Thy soothing hand may press!  
Thy neighbor? Yonder toiling Slave,  
Fettered in thought and limb,  
Whose hopes are all beyond the grave—  
Go thou, and ransom him!"*

And he resolved to go and help his crushed and bleeding brethren; to deliver them from the burdens, too heavy to bear, which had so long bowed them to the ground; and to bring them out of the house of worse than Egyptian bondage.

Of this man, and of his actions, I am now to speak. In memory of this "good Samaritan" I have resolved to preach a "Funeral sermon." It is not often that a funeral sermon is preached over one whose spirit goes to the eternal world from the GALLOWS—over one who was charged with the crimes of "treason, robbery and murder!" But, notwithstanding the malice of his enemies, and the silence of those who profess to be his friends, I rejoice that I have this opportunity of bearing testimony to the truth, and of paying my feeble tribute to the memory of that honest, valiant, noble man, who "counted not his life dear unto him, so that he might finish his course with joy." I stand not here to advocate deeds of violence and bloodshed, or to vindicate war in any of its forms. Neither, on the other hand, do I intend to condemn the acts of the deceased, or to impugn the motives which led him to those acts. He has already been arraigned before one human tribunal, and now his soul has gone to appear in the presence of the righteous Judge of all the earth. But I shall speak of him as I find him; review his character in the light of reason and revelation; and then leave you to decide whether I am successful in proving him, in the language of the text, "a just man that perished in his righteousness." And may Heavenly grace descend into our hearts, so that we may profit by the subject now before us, and be led fervently to pray, "Let me die the death of the righteous!"

As to the LIFE of the deceased, a short and necessarily imperfect sketch only can be presented. No authentic memoir has yet been published, and all we know of him is from the items which have appeared in the various journals of the day. But I have gathered enough to serve as an outline for the present occasion; enough to show that the lamented hero came of good old stock; and that amid all the vicissitudes of what was indeed "a chequered life," he proved himself to be a worthy descendant of worthy ancestors, one of nature's true noblemen, and a credit to any name, or family, or age, or nation.

JOHN BROWN was born in Litchfield county, Connecticut, in the year 1800. He was the sixth in descent from Peter Brown, one of the "Mayflower" Pilgrims, who landed at Plymouth in 1620. John's father, Owen Brown, was a contractor to the army during the war of 1812. His grandfather was a Captain in the army of the Revolution. John Brown's ancestors were farmers—sturdy, honest yeomen, ready at all times to serve their country, and to stand up for the right. And John himself seems to have paid more attention to farming than to anything else—though he was at various times a surveyor, a tanner, a wool-dealer, and latterly a **WAR-RIOR**. Before his appearance in the far West he had resided in Connecticut, in Ohio, in Pennsylvania, in Massachusetts, and in New-York. Then, in 1855, he made his first appearance in Kansas. A public meeting was in progress at Ossawatimie, at which the politicians of the territory were carefully adjusting a series of resolutions so as to suit every variety of "Free State men." A motion was offered in favor of excluding all "negroes" from the territory. This called out John Brown, who at once scattered alarm and discord in the council, by asserting the manhood and rights of the colored race, and by expressing his anti-slavery opinions in a manner not at all soothing or acceptable to the audience. Brown went to Kansas, it seems, not to settle there, but to assist his sons; and, it may be, to aid in defending that territory from the encroachments of the Slave power. He soon began to suffer for his steady opposition to tyranny. His assailants plotted against him, and he experienced many losses and much ill-treatment at their hands. One son was killed in cold blood, and while unarmed! Another son was seized, while ploughing, loaded with chains, and driven for many long and weary miles, with such malignant cruelty as to destroy his reason! His house, and those of his sons, were destroyed by fire! The women of the family were insulted; a price was set upon the old man's head; and every indignity that Missouri barbarity could devise was heaped upon him! But he was himself preserved, almost miraculously, from the schemes of his enemies. He seemed to bear a charmed life, and he was "a wonder unto many." Then, seeing the desperate state of affairs, he resolved to fight the battles of Freedom. He determined to be a hero and a leader in the warfare between Truth and Error, the struggle between Right and Wrong. "Like Napoleon, he had unbounded confidence in his own destiny and resources. Like Cromwell, he trusted in God, and kept his powder dry." He prayed fervently, dealt blows lustily, and thanked God heartily for victory! For two years he resisted bravely the minions of Slavery, and his name became a terror to the whole race of "Border Ruffians." His hand was against every pro-slavery man, and every pro-slavery man's hand was against him. Having resisted the intruders at every point, having also been instrumental in rescuing numerous slaves, and knowing that Kansas was

secured to freedom, Brown removed to the neighborhood of Harper's Ferry, in Virginia. He had, it seems, formed a design to enter the State at that place, to rescue large numbers of the slaves, and to escape with them, from time to time, to the mountains. At intervals he visited other localities and enlisted recruits, especially from amongst those who had fought with him in Kansas. The sequel is well known. His seizure of the Arsenal; his long-protracted defence against such fearful odds; the loss of his two sons and most of his gallant followers; the bayonet and sabre wounds inflicted on him with such savage cruelty by his pursuers; his capture, trial, imprisonment and death—are facts too familiar to be recounted here in detail. By his heroic but fatal adventure he has become "the observed of all observers;" and by his deeds of daring he has rendered "Harper's Ferry" as renowned as ancient Thermopylæ! By his noble life and glorious death he has won imperishable fame! And as the friends of the oppressed look with sad hearts but strong hopes into the hero's grave, and then turn away to engage with renewed zeal in the struggle against tyranny, they may well exclaim:

We will think of *thee*, O brother, and thy sainted name shall be—  
In the blessing of the captive, and the anthem of the free!"

The time is not yet come, even for John Brown's friends, to understand thoroughly, to present clearly—in all its minute details—the CHARACTER of that wondrous man. Such differences of opinion are maintained with reference to him, and prejudice has so warped the mind and distorted the vision, that it is not an easy task to attempt an analysis of his character, or to group together the broken and scattered facts available for the purpose in hand. By one class of persons he is regarded as a monster, a criminal, a murderer; by another, a fanatic or a madman; and by another, and I trust not an inconsiderable class, he is esteemed a hero, a saint, a martyr! And yet from the facts already stated, and from others now to be named, we shall be able, I trust, to gain some insight into his true character, and to point out some of the more prominent features which distinguished him.

John Brown was A BRAVE MAN! To this fact all, even his enemies, will testify. So great was his courage, so marvelous his strength, that it seems as if some long-buried hero of the olden time had risen from his silent grave to astonish the world with deeds of mighty prowess! His was not the bragging, tinsel bravery which spends itself in words! His was bravery in action! He went to work with a will; and he rested not till he had accomplished what he thought to be his duty, no matter how severe the task should prove. His daring deeds in Kansas, his conduct at the Arsenal, his fortitude in captivity, his demeanor on the scaffold, all prove him to have been "a mighty valiant man." He evidently believed that, engaged in the right cause, battling on the Lord's side, "one

would be able to chase a thousand, and two to put ten thousand to flight." And when we hear of the panic he caused in Virginia and the surrounding States, we cannot but think he was not far astray in his belief. It was the consciousness that he was on the side of truth, of justice, of God, that nerved him for his unequal conflicts. It was the love which "beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, and endureth all things," that sustained and soothed him amid all his trials and persecutions, enabling him to look upward "with an unfaltering trust," and to approach his grave exclaiming, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

John Brown was A MAN OF STERN INTEGRITY! His conscientiousness in all his transactions was apparent to every one with whom he came in contact. His honesty in his religion, in his business, and in his battles, had become proverbial, had distinguished him wherever his lot was cast. Much of this unbending integrity seems to have been inherited; for it was often remarked, "Whoever can get the promise of a Brown of that breed considers himself secure." He was at all times, and in all the relations of life, trustworthy, truthful, promise-keeping. It was said of him that "in Kansas he was the great living test of principle in the politicians; the more corrupt the man, the more he denounced John Brown." And it was well known that he would not gather around him, if he could prevent it, any but honest and upright men. He was heard to say, "I would rather have the small-pox, the yellow-fever and the cholera, all together, in my camp, than a man without principle." This devotion to principle, this reverence for truth and uprightness, furnishes us with the key to his philanthropy, solves the mystery that would otherwise enshroud some of his actions, and explains why he was a terror and a scourge to evil-doers—why he sacrificed his life for the sake of the oppressed.

And this leads me to the consideration of what was, amid all his other virtues, the crowning excellence and glory of his character—that feature by which we may the more readily test his claim to be considered a servant of God. I refer to his true and tried PHILANTHROPY, his pure and unselfish BENEVOLENCE! This gives him a higher claim to our sympathy and esteem than any other plea that can be set up. He had a stout arm, a strong will, an honest intention, but, more than all, A TRUE AND LOVING HEART—a heart whose every pulsation beat in unison with the great heart of humanity! This prompted him to relieve the distressed, to pity those "who had no comforter"—to stand up for those who had no helper. His sympathies were world-wide. He aimed at impartial justice to all, and was the generous friend of all, no matter of what color, or creed, or condition. He was a firm believer in that famous, though incendiary document, "the Declaration of Independence"—that inval-

uable legacy of our forefathers, which the captors and murderers of John Brown have so completely ignored! He was also a consistent believer in the Golden Rule! He made it his rule of action, and he carried out its principle according to the dictates of his own conscience. When questioned as to the principle by which he justified his acts at the Ferry, he promptly replied, "By the golden rule." "I hold," said he, "that that rule applies to all who would help others to gain their liberty. I pity the poor in bondage that have none to help them; that is why I am here." And in his famous speech at the close of his trial, how forcibly did "the old man eloquent" set forth his belief. Said he:

"I see a book kissed, which I suppose to be the Bible, or at least the New Testament, which teaches me that 'all things whatsoever I would that men should do to me, I should do even so to them.' It teaches me further, to 'remember them that are in bonds as bound with them.' I endeavored to act up to that instruction. I say I am yet too young to understand that God is any respecter of persons. I believe that to have interfered as I have done, as I have always freely admitted I have done, in behalf of His despised poor, no wrong, but right. Now if it is deemed necessary that I should forfeit my life for the furtherance of the ends of justice, and mingle my blood further with the blood of my children, and with the blood of millions in this slave country whose rights are disregarded by wicked, cruel and unjust enactments, I say, let it be done!"

And which one of us, my hearers, would dare, after listening to so glorious a declaration, to condemn his conduct, or to sully his memory with a single stain of reproach? Rather let those sublime words of his, "I AM YET TOO YOUNG TO UNDERSTAND THAT GOD IS A RESPECTER OF PERSONS," be engraved deeply upon our hearts, inscribed in letters of gold on every house, repeated at every fire-side, and echoed throughout the world! Let us rather thank God that his trusty servant was enabled, by Grace Divine, to bear such plain testimony in that Southern Court-House, and amid the jeers and insults of that tyrannical crowd!

It has been charged that John Brown was ferocious and unmerciful, especially during his Kansas career. But when we remember that not only his family, but all who knew him, bear testimony to his uniform kindness of heart; and that to the poor everywhere, to friends in distress, to those who became his prisoners, to each and all, he was attentive and compassionate, we may at once repel the charge, and assert that he was, pre-eminently, A HUMANE AND MERCIFUL MAN! He not only sympathized with suffering and sorrow, but he did what he could to relieve those who were in need. But to do this, and to give his sympathy a practical shape, he daily denied himself. To his credit it may be mentioned that he had never used ardent spirits or tobacco! And he never suffered himself or



his family to wear expensive clothing, constantly urging as his reason, "Let us save the money and give to the poor." It was said of him that "amid all his persecutions he never perpetrated an act of wanton or unnecessary cruelty." When, only a few days before his death, the charge of cruelty was mentioned to him, he replied, "Time and the honest verdict of posterity will approve of every act of mine to prevent Slavery from being established in Kansas. I never shed the blood of a fellow man except in self-defense, or in the promotion of a righteous cause!"

But to sum up the remaining features of John Brown's character, it will be sufficient to affirm that he was, according to unbiased testimony, and, judging from his words and deeds, sincere in his profession of religion, that he was a true servant of the Most High—A ZEALOUS AND DEVOUT CHRISTIAN! In making this assertion I am, I know, treading on delicate ground; flatly contradicting the old man's enemies, and arraying myself against not a few who ought to be his friends. I know that even in the North, numerous preachers, yea, even Doctors of Divinity—to their shame be it said—have denounced and most vehemently protested against what they call "this misplaced sympathy for John Brown." I know too that many Pharisaical professors of religion have lifted up their hands and opened wide their eyes in holy horror at the bare thought of admitting his claim to be "a brother in Christ." I know also that the editor of a Pittsburgh paper, with a zeal worthy of a better cause, took great care, on the evening of the execution day, to stigmatise the murdered man as "an old fanatic;" and to assert that Governor Wise had "succeeded in making a hero, a martyr, and a saint out of one who was never intended for either." But, knowing this opposition, and in the face of these contrary statements, I dare affirm that, so far as I am able to judge, JOHN BROWN WAS A RIGHTEOUS MAN! That he was a hero, needs no proof; that he was a martyr, let what I have said suffice to show; and that he was a saint, long before the erratic Governor interfered in his behalf, is at least capable of tolerable proof. Granted that he was, if you please, a saint fashioned somewhat after the Old Testament pattern; a warrior Christian of the Cromwellian breed; a servant of God "born out of due time," and shaped after the ancient Puritan model. But this does not alter the case, and should not bias the mind against him, nor exclude him from the sympathy of the true-hearted. Are we prepared to class Moses amongst the unbelievers because he went down to Egypt to punish the task-masters, and to bring his brethren out of the house of bondage? Shall we reject Joshua, and Gideon, and Sampson, because of their violent attacks on the heathen nations? Shall we give up David as a reprobate because he slaughtered the hosts of the Philistines, and "turned to flight the armies of the aliens?" John Brown has evidently, though in a very slight degree, imbibed the spirit and followed the example of those dis-

tinguished Old Testament saints. And after studying their lives, and reading the explicit command, "Fight the Lord's battles," he has been guilty of interpreting the words literally, instead of metaphorically; guilty of rushing on the errand before consulting some trusty old commentator, or seeking the advice of some orthodox divine! This is apparent from the manner in which he talked to and rallied his friends whilst in Kansas. He said on one occasion: "Talking is a national institution, but it does no good for the slave. It is an excuse very well adapted for weak men with tender consciences. But my ideas of duty are far different. I hold that the slaves are prisoners of war; the tyrants have taken up the sword, and must perish by it." And in replying from his prison to the kind letter of a Quaker lady, he wrote: "You know that Christ once armed Peter. So also in my case, I think he put a sword into my hand, and there continued it so long as he saw best, and then took it from me. I mean when I first went to Kansas. I wish you could know with what cheerfulness I am now wielding the 'sword of the Spirit,' on the right hand and on the left. I bless God that it proves 'mighty to the pulling down of strong-holds.'"

With my present convictions of duty, and ideas of right and wrong, and believing, as I do, that the Gospel of Christ is opposed to war in all its forms, I could not take up the sword for any purpose whatever. I should not dare to make use of "carnal weapons," no matter how righteous I deemed the cause in which I desired to engage. But I cannot, dare not, condemn or vilify John Brown, or any other man, for taking up arms, and; if occasion demands, using them, in rescuing human beings from bondage! And surely if any excuse can be made, any apology offered for warfare, it is when it is conscientiously engaged in for the sake of delivering those who need help, but are unable to help themselves. And here I must most earnestly protest against the ideas of those shallow-minded hypocrites who justify and glory in the warlike deeds of others, but are so ready to heap infamy on the head of the old hero so recently sent to his account. Which of John Brown's defamers does not glory in Washington, in Kosciusko, in La Fayette? And yet their hands were steeped in blood, their swords were wielded in aggressive as well as defensive warfare! But they were only resisting a tyrannical "Stamp Act;" fighting for political liberty; contending for national independence! Washington was shedding blood to secure his own liberty and that of his countrymen. And Kosciusko and La Fayette, strangers and foreigners, thought it their duty to assist King George's rebellious subjects in carrying out their revolutionary ideas. Had that Revolution been crushed out, its leaders would have been regarded as TRAITORS, and the whole movement would no doubt have been spoken of as TREASON!

"Treason does never prosper; what's the reason?  
Why when it prospers, none dare call it treason."

Who does not know that multitudes of those who condemn Brown, yes, and thousands of Southern despots, too, are overflowing with sympathy for Kossuth, Garibaldi and other fighting revolutionists: and are eager to contribute to the "million musket fund," in order that Italy and Hungary may become FREE? Suppose that even one hundred innocent WHITE men had been penned up in Virginia, forced to labor without compensation and to endure the most shameful indignities at the hands of their conquerors. How long would it be ere rescuing parties would set out for their relief? And who would not admire and honor the movement? Who would not trumpet abroad the fame of the leaders? What would become then of the scruples about "bloodshed," the ideas about "deeds of violence," which now so distress the minds of the faithful? I am then forced to the conclusion that it is not the fighting, nor the interference with tyrants, that is objected to. But it is the COLOR of the unfortunate race for whom the old man sacrificed his life! That is the reason why sympathy is withheld, why odium and contempt are lavished on those who are not afraid or ashamed to think, and speak, and act with reference to the matter!

But, leaving this inquiry as to John Brown's fighting propensities, I will finish the review of his claim to Christian character. He was A ZEALOUS STUDENT OF THE WORD OF GOD! And that, as I have shown, was the store-house whence he drew the arguments in justification of his course. He was indeed a man "mighty in the Scriptures." He knew by heart nearly every portion of the Sacred record; and he manifested his reverence for its teachings, by reading it daily with, and recommending it to, his family. He was A MAN OF PRAYER! In his camp in Kansas, as well as at his home, prayers were offered morning and evening; and he constantly sought Divine guidance before engaging in his terrible struggles with the foes of freedom. He seemed to have unbounded confidence that the "Lord of Hosts" was on the side of the oppressed, and would both hear and answer the petitions offered up in their behalf. In private life, he aimed not only to set a good example to others, but also to rebuke sin in its various forms. And as an instance of his faithfulness in this respect, it may be named that he would not at any time tolerate profanity. As to his religious affinities, it is recorded that early in life he became a member of a Congregational Church; but about thirty years ago he joined a Presbyterian Church, with which, it is said, he remained connected during the rest of his eventful life.

A word further as to his mysterious plan with reference to the invasion of Virginia. "He believed Slavery to be an institution accursed of God and man, and he considered himself to be Divinely appointed to bring about its destruction." One of his favorite passages of Scripture was well known to be, "Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them." His noble wife asserts that so

far from being actuated by a spirit of revenge on account of his Kansas wrongs, he had been "waiting a great many years for some opportunity to free the slaves." Said she, "He has borne the yoke of the oppressed, as if upon his own neck, FOR THIRTY YEARS!" And during his trial the old man remarked, "I deny everything but what I have all along asserted, of a design on my part to free slaves. I never did intend murder, or treason, or the destruction of property, or to excite slaves to rebellion, or to make insurrection." In fact the whole of his design could not be more forcibly or briefly described than in the words of the martyr Stephen, who in recounting the early history of Moses, said: "And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian; for he supposed that his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them; but they understood not." (Acts, vii: 24, 25.)

As to Brown's insanity, about which so much has been said, it is a question almost too frivolous to be discussed. On this point also the testimony of his wife should have some weight. She says, "I never knew of his insanity till I read it in the papers. He has always been, and is now, in his right mind; but he has always acted upon his first perceptions of duty. His last act was the result, as all his other acts have been, of his truest and strongest conscientious convictions!" The attempt made at Harper's Ferry has been called a wild, a hasty, an insane adventure. True, it may appear so to most men. But to its projector, who can doubt that it appeared plausible, and capable of being fully carried out? And after all, it is not an easy matter to decide what is insanity, in this selfish and degenerate world! Long ago, some of the best and holiest of men were accused of "turning the world upside down." The false charge of madness is not a new one, when men have sought to rebuke sin or to overthrow oppression. Jeremiah was accused of madness, and it was suggested that he ought to be "put in prison, and in the stocks." To the eloquent Paul it was said, "much learning doth make thee mad!" And even of Paul's Divine Master it was asserted, "He hath a devil, and is mad!" So that John Brown, knowing the wildness of Southern schemes, and the insanity of attempting to defend or perpetuate Slavery, might well have replied to the charge:

"Lay not that flattering unction to your soul,  
That not *your trespass*, but *my madness* speaks:  
It will but skin and flim the ulcerous place,  
Whilst rank corruption, mining all within,  
Infects unseen!"

Having reviewed the life and character of John Brown, I will now notice briefly his FATE. What treatment has he received at the hands of those amongst whom he fell? What was reserved for so generous, so brave, so noble a specimen of manhood? Must another

er pure, benevolent and virtuous being be sacrificed on the altar of tyranny? Must he be bayoneted, sabred, mocked, chained, and strangled? Must another martyr be added to the long and mournful list? Must another saint—"of whom the world was not worthy"—be put out of the way of the tyrant—dispatched suddenly upon his journey to the far-off land? Yes! It must be so! Virginia thus rewards heroes! Mercy has no dwelling-place in the heart of the oppressor! Truth and justice cannot find shelter in the house built by fraud, and propped up by violence and deceit! For Socrates, the poisonous cup must be prepared; for John the Evangelist, the boiling cauldron; for Galileo, the terrors of the Inquisition; for Latimer, the devouring flames: for JOHN BROWN, the ignominious gallows! Stern, unyielding, honest reformer! Thy fault was that thou didst love too well thy fellow man! The State of Virginia, in solemn mockery, finds John Brown "guilty of treason, robbery and murder." But it is evident that he was NOT GUILTY of either of those crimes! And that a Slave State, reared as it is on the bleeding bodies of so many thousands of bondmen, should be his accuser, is indeed "passing strange!" Virginia is guilty of TREASON of the worst, of the most daring kind; treason against the Court of High Heaven; treason, because she has assumed prerogatives belonging to God only! Jehovah says, "All souls are mine!" "Let the oppressed go free!" Virginia replies: "No! 500,000 of them are MINE; and I dare any man to take them away from my grasp!" The hypocritical State is also palpably guilty of ROBBERY and MURDER, and that on a most extensive scale. Let the man-stealing, slave-murdering operations carried on within her borders testify to that fact! If Virginia has a sincere desire to have her enactments respected, her laws obeyed, let her "cease to do evil, and learn to do well;" let her "seek judgment and relieve the oppressed." Laws written in blood, and tears, and groans, are no laws to the righteous man! Conflicting as they do with the HIGHER LAW, which tells him to "do justice and to love mercy," he is bound to trample them under foot, no matter what personal consequences may ensue!

The life and death of John Brown is a subject teeming with lessons of wisdom; a tragedy abounding in well-merited rebukes, and in solemn and much-needed warnings. "A just man has perished in his righteousness;" perished in attempting to "proclaim liberty to the captive." And Virginia is responsible for his murder! Though the "wicked man" may "prolong his life in his wickedness," a time of reckoning will surely come! A just God will not, cannot suffer such monstrous wickedness to go unpunished! "Know thou that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment!" Is it supposed that the old hero's life was a mistake? His attempt at Harper's Ferry a FAILURE? "A failure?" No! It was a great and glorious success! Note the effects of his adven-

ture, as developed throughout the South. See how far and wide the panic spreads! "Dred" has spoken from the tree-tops, and lo! "all faces are turned into paleness!" The Court House must be guarded with cannon; every stranger must be forced to depart; not a whisper of sympathy must be allowed; the troops from all parts must be summoned; even the Railroad must be seized; passports and countersigns must be provided; and terror, and confusion, and cowardice be thus displayed on every side, and wafted on the wings of every breeze! At the North the effects are just as marked and visible. At the first reports of the affair, incredulity; then merriment; then scorn; then intense excitement; then indignation, loud and long-continued, as the reckless and despotic doings of the Governor and his party are noted! And is it fancied that the panic at the South, or the excitement at the North, can be allayed now that the old man, "after life's fitful fever, sleeps well?" No! The death of John Brown will increase instead of allaying the excitement; will certainly precipitate the great struggle between Freedom and Slavery which **MUST** ere long take place! Two elements so antagonistic cannot long slumber side by side, cannot remain torpid amid the din and clamor of approaching war! God is on the side of Right and Justice: and "who shall stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest thou?" The cry is even now going forth, "Who is on the Lord's side?" Let us earnestly pray that the warfare which must be engaged in may be a moral and not a physical warfare. And as we do not believe in "carnal weapons," let us use the weapons furnished us. "Let us put on the whole armor of God, that we may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand." Let us, as soldiers of the cross, prepare manfully for the contest; and, relying in the strength of the Lord, let us

"Grasp the weapons he has given,  
The Light, and Truth, and Love of Heaven!"

The old hero has fought his last battle: and his body now sleeps in the cold embrace of death. But "he being dead yet speaketh!" His spirit, which still lives, and which shall still animate the friends of liberty, says to the nation, in tones of solemn warning: "Be wise in time! Put away the abomination from your midst! Cast the Achan out of the camp! Wipe out that stain which has so long defaced thy beauty! Remove that sin which is thy reproach and disgrace amongst the nations of the earth! And ye who profess to be the lovers of Truth, the standard-bearers of Freedom, listen not to those who cry 'Peace, peace! when there is no peace!' Put no faith in those who 'daub with untempered mortar,' and who seek to patch up their sins with excuses, and delays, and compromises! Stand up for the Right! Be ready at all times to defend and protect God's poor and stricken ones! Fear not to lift up a warning voice to all who need it! Knowing the will of your Father in

Heaven, hesitate not to proclaim it! Proclaim liberty to the poor captive, at home, as well as abroad! Speak boldly! Speak out!"

"If ye have whispered truth, whisper no longer;  
Speak as the tempest does, sterner and stronger!"

We cannot look back upon the wondrous career of John Brown without mingled feelings of grief, and gratitude, and admiration. Admiration, because of the noble deeds which graced his life; gratitude, because of the lessons to be learned from his history; grief, because a true and valiant brother has passed away from our midst! But "we sorrow not, even as others which have no hope." We look upward to that "House not made with hands, eternal in the Heavens." And we believe that our brother has entered its portals, and has heard the welcome plaudit: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: **ENTER THOU INTO THE JOY OF THY LORD!**"







Put with Funeral Sermon.

THE

# EXECUTION OF JOHN BROWN;

A DISCOURSE,

Delivered at Chicago, December 4th, 1859,

IN THE

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH.

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*William*

BY REV. W. W. PATTON.

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## THE EXECUTION OF JOHN BROWN.

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*John 12: 24.*—"Verily, verily I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit."

By the use of a striking analogy, Jesus draws attention to the fact, that a man's death may be productive of the most beneficial results to the cause with which he is identified—nay, not only so, but that the power of a man's death may reduce his previous life to a mere cypher. A grain of wheat, "abiding alone," though for never so many years, of what value is it? There is no coin small enough to buy it. It is too diminutive to avail for food. No storage in the granary will increase the bulk. In its present form it is in fact perfectly useless. But let it come under sentence of death, to be cast forth as a vile and despicable thing; at the proper season, make a grave for it in the earth, and hide it out of sight in the damp ground; there let it lie neglected, till it bursts asunder and is seemingly destroyed; and what have you done? Reduced it to nothing, or to the mere dust of decay? Nay, verily. You have made it a thing of power. You have multiplied it fifty fold. From its bursting heart issues a tender shoot that seeks the air and sun; and that crowns itself, at last, with the bearded head that teems with grain. And

were that head of wheat dealt with in like manner, the process would need to be repeated but a few times, to spread before the gladdened eye a glorious harvest field, from which the toiling farmer would draw his wealth and hungering thousands their bread.

And so Christ would have us understand, that a man who dies for the truth, who yields himself as a sacrifice for a righteous cause, is so far from perishing thereby out of all influence, that he actually multiplies his power a thousand fold; that, paradoxical as the assertion may be, he then only begins to live. He offered himself as the chief illustration of the truth; for he prefaced the declaration with the words, "The hour is come that the Son of man should be glorified." And lest any of his disciples should mistake his meaning, nor once associate the idea of "glory" with an ignominious execution as a malefactor, he added the text to show how death might operate to set upon a man the seal of honor and power. It is quite needless, when eighteen centuries have accumulated the evidence, for me to point out the verification of Christ's predictive remark concerning himself. If proof were desired, it would be sufficient to take the word *cross*, once the synonym

of shame and now that of glory, once the representative of weakness even unto death, but now the symbol of power and of endless life; and the change owing simply to the fact that on the cross the murdered Jesus breathed his last breath! Satan was fool enough to suppose that a grain of wheat perished when it was planted! He thought he had secured the world's ruin when he had crucified its Redeemer; and behold he had unwittingly accomplished its salvation!

But let it not be imagined that Christ meant to restrict the application of the text to himself, because he was the highest illustration of the truth which it expressed, or because his death sustained a peculiar relation to the world. Not only is the language general and as it were proverbial, but in the following verse he expressly leads each reader to make a personal application of it, that we too may exercise its sublime faith and prepare, if Providence require, for the necessary sacrifice; saying, "He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world, shall keep it unto life eternal." No man can tell in what circumstances he may be placed in relation to the cause of truth, or when he may be called to choose between death and cowardice; between the sacrifice of his own life and treason to God and humanity. As in every such case, a false expediency would fain persuade us that it were folly and insanity to court death and thus to lose forever all opportunity to promote the cause we love, Christ hastens to reassure our moral courage and sound judgment, by declaring that death in such circumstances is the highest testimony we can bear to the truth, and that the grave when it closes over our lifeless remains, shall be but as the furrow when it has embosomed the seed.

Under the Old Dispensation, when principles clothed themselves in rude forms, and God suffered men to be taught divine

truths by harsh methods, such as were then necessary from the world's lack of mental and moral culture, Samson was the striking exemplification of this idea. He was a rough, uncouth, physical type of the grand thought that death may crown the deeds of life with a still vaster result. He was God's scourge of the Philistines, and under his stalwart arm many an uncircumcised oppressor of God's people bit the dust. But at last, and by his own folly too, they had him in prison; they put out his eyes; they bound his feet with fetters of brass, and his power seemed to have departed forever. "The lords of the Philistines gathered them together for to offer a great sacrifice unto Dagon their god and to rejoice; for they said, 'Our god hath delivered Samson our enemy into our hand.' And when the people saw him, they praised their god; for they said, 'Our god hath delivered into our hands our enemy and the destroyer of our country, who slew many of us.'" The grand temple of Dagon was filled with three thousand men and women assembled to exult over Samson, when with a prayer to God for aid, the captive hero seized the main columns which supported the building and bowed forward "with all his might." The support gave way; the massive edifice fell with a crash upon the mocking oppressors, and the inspired penman records this significant sentence:—"So the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life." Madman! fanatic! suicide! About the pale conservatives, as they contemplate the scene; but the author of the epistle to the Hebrews places the name of Samson on the list of the worthies who "obtained a good report through faith," and, "who, through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turn-

ed to flight the armies of the aliens."—That was the most impressive mode of instruction in that barbaric age, and perhaps it were not too much to say, that even now, when men by their vices, cherish the barbaric spirit, and when nations in their crimes show that the mild influence of Christianity has not civilized them, God will insert in their history a chapter out of the Old Testament, and will raise up a Samson to be their instructor in morals.

When a few more centuries had rolled by, the illustrations of the truth which we are considering assumed the form of martyrdoms. Prophets were slain by incensed kings for their faithful political preaching, and bequeathed their memories and principles as a rich legacy to the nation and the world. Then, as introductory to the Savior, came John the Baptist, with his brief but powerful ministry, which (by consulting worldly prudence and preserving the favor of Herod, which was at first accorded to him) he might have prolonged, at least in its outward form to old age. But he was a ripe seed to be best used by being planted; and so, with full faith in the doctrine of the text, he persisted in "ruining his influence" by rebuking the crimes of the king, and met a violent death, and God immortalized his example by giving it a place in the Bible, where it has been a power in moulding the characters of millions for eighteen centuries. Next came the illustrious victory of the cross, in which Christ verified his own declaration that death sows the seed of a measureless harvest, and then follows the long procession of Christian martyrs, from Stephen to our own times, the result of whose sufferings and deaths has been so uniform as to give rise to the familiar proverb, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church." And the principle has held true even beyond its strictly religious illustrations, history teach-

ing us that the victims who perish in the first stages of resistance to any form of wrong and outrage in the world, do not die in vain, nor is their influence diminished but rather increased by their heroic sacrifice. The sword and the axe have often proved to be the ploughshares that turned the furrow in which the madness of oppressors unwittingly planted the seed of subsequent revolutions, which under the sunshine of a favoring Providence, ripened into human deliverance.

And now let us inquire by what methods death becomes even more fruitful than life. Principally by two:

1. It compels attention to the grand point at issue. Death is too solemn an event to pass without notice, even in its ordinary private occurrence. But when it comes publicly, by order of the rulers, or in the violent rage of the people, it arrests universal attention. The inquiry is heard from every lip, Why is this? What has the man done? How did he forfeit his life? Then ensue statement and counter statement, accusation and defence, argument and appeal. At first those who suffer for the truth will be overwhelmed with obloquy; for they belong to the apparently insignificant minority, against whom is an almost universal outcry. But, under God's blessing, truth will gradually clear itself from the mists of prejudice and passion. That men should be found willing to die for their principles, argues at least honesty and heroism on their part, and an electrifying power in their peculiar belief. The object for which they shed their blood must seem to them to be noble and unspeakably important; may it not really be that they are contending for a sublime truth, or exposing a deadly error, or resisting an insufferable outrage? Such suspicions, leading to investigation, soon ripen into conviction in intelligent and thoughtful minds, and spread thence to others under their

influence, till a general change of opinion is secured. Thus the mere fact of martyrdom occasions inquiry and discussion such as no amount of ordinary conversation or preaching would secure.

2. But perhaps a still more potent influence is, the direct contagion of the spirit and example of the martyrs. The heart naturally responds to deeds of heroism. We admire bravery even in a bad cause; we are touched with sympathy and respect for fortitude even where it is sustained by fanaticism. Hence all experience proves, that there is no surer way to propagate error and delusion than to persecute its advocates. These may gain through sympathy for their sufferings what they would fail to secure by their arguments. If then, men die for the truth; if in their last moments they give utterance to sentiments which, piercing through the outward armor of law and custom, appeal directly to the conscience; if they manifest a spirit of faith in God and love to man, and show that they act from no selfish considerations, but from high moral principle; if their dying declarations elicit a response from the noblest instincts of the human breast; there will be a contagion in their character and deeds which no power on earth or in hell can nullify. Their very looks and tones will beget conviction among the spectators; their lofty bearing and spirit of self-sacrifice will pass, as by inspiration, into the noble natures among those who witness their death; their last utterances will be caught up with reverent devotion, carried as on the wings of the wind to the most distant places, and adopted as the watch-words of future generations; and their graves will be as the altars of religion, to which men will come to put themselves and their children under oaths of eternal hatred to falsehood and crime. This, it is well known, was the effect of the heathen persecutions directed

against the early Christians. Such was the faith, purity, meekness and fortitude of the sufferers, that converts multiplied at every martyrdom, and ere long, death so lost its accustomed terror, and the scaffold and stake become so ennobled by the precious blood which had stained them, that new disciples avowed themselves amid the multitude in the very courts and at the place of execution, and vied with each other in claiming the martyr's fate and crown. Thus was death more fruitful than life.

I need not dwell longer upon the general principle announced in our text. You have already anticipated the application which the events of the past week would suggest, and to which I would now direct attention, only premising, that such are the relations of the question which they raise, that it becomes us both as citizens and as christians to consider carefully the positions which we may assume.

On Friday, the second of December, in this the year of our Lord, eighteen hundred and fifty-nine, at Charlestown, in the State of Virginia, John Brown was publicly executed on the gallows, by the authorities of that State. No execution has ever excited so much interest in this country, or given rise to such conflicting opinions. There is no dispute as to what John Brown actually did; there is a wide difference of judgment as to the moral character of his conduct. That we may reach a calm and considerate conclusion, let us notice separately the man and his deeds; and the latter first.

John Brown was executed for alleged treason against the State of Virginia, for endeavoring to excite an insurrection among the slaves, and for murder. As the charge of murder was not based on anything that usually bears that name, but on acts more nearly parallel to deaths caused in war, and as the killing was incidental to the prosecution of his other plans and

occurred while defending himself therein, we need not dwell upon it separately.—The charge of treason would seem necessarily to apply only to a citizen of the State who had sought to overthrow the government, and as John Brown never was a citizen of Virginia nor even a resident, as he denied any intention of overthrowing the government, and as no proof of the fact was adduced on the trial, we may dismiss that charge also.

The real ground of offence, which has excited the anger of the South, while it has elicited the sympathy of the North, has been his attempt to secure freedom for the slaves. Doubt has existed as to the precise nature of his plans in this respect; whether he simply intended to effect a forcible rescue of a certain number, carrying off to Canada an armed body of fugitives from Virginia, as he did a year since from Missouri, which is his own dying and most credible explanation of his designs; or whether he hoped to excite insurrection, with vague hopes that from a local rebellion it might spread through all the slave States and, perhaps, without overthrowing the government, extort an act of emancipation.

Let the following extract from his speech in court speak for itself:

"I have, may it please the Court, a few words to say. In the first place, I deny everything but what I have all along admitted, the design on my part to free the slaves. I intended certainly to have made a clean thing of that matter, as I did last winter when I went into Missouri, and ~~there took the slaves without the snapping of a gun on either side, moving them through the country, and finally left them in Canada.~~ I designed to have done the same thing again on a larger scale. That was all I intended. I never did intend to commit murder, nor treason, nor to excite or incite the slaves to rebellion and to make an insurrection."

At all events, he made an armed nocturnal attack upon the place known as Harper's Ferry, seized the United States ar-

senal, made sundry prisoners, was surrounded by troops, defended himself by force of arms, occasioning several deaths on both sides, including that of two of his own sons and was finally wounded, overpowered by numbers, seized, imprisoned, tried with a haste and prejudice which mocked alike the spirit and the form of justice, convicted, sentenced and executed. What opinion shall we express as Christians, upon this matter? What shall I say as a minister of the Lord Jesus?

That we should have sympathy with John Brown in the general object of securing freedom to the slaves, follows not merely from our christianity but from our very manhood. He has sunk below the level of our common humanity whose heart does not respond to the appeal of the slave, as against his master and the laws by which his master holds him in bondage. It needs no revelation to assure us, that as there is an eternal distinction between a *person* and a *thing*, so the chattel principle, which affirms human beings to be property, is only and always a lie. But it does not follow from this, that all means may be used indiscriminately for the overthrow of the system which recognizes and enforces this lie, or for the rescue of individual sufferers. The apostle hath warned us against the rule, "Let us do evil that good may come," as a damnable heresy. Let me therefore carefully state what I suppose to be the truth on this point according to sound reason and the word of God.

The Bible, aside from its code of laws for the Jews, under the old dispensation, does not legislate directly for civil communities as such. It simply indicates those general principles of justice and humanity which they are bound to recognize under pain of divine displeasure. Therefore it does not inculcate political truth as regards the best form of government, nor instruct communities as to the right,



duty and time of a revolution, where government has become a mere tyranny and defeats its divinely appointed end. It addresses individual men in their personal relations to government, and enjoins obedience to all righteous law, and patient submission to unjust enactments, until such time as deliverance may come; which may be by a peaceable change of rulers or by a successful revolution on the part of the people as a body. No sanction is given to mere individual outbreaks, whether from revenge, despair, or a desire of redress; because such outbreaks, encourage evil passions, lead to rash enterprises, bring ruin on all concerned with them, cover religion with the reproach of being an exciter of sedition and an enemy of good order, and produce in every way more evil than they remedy.

Now apply these principles to the subject of slavery and the way of duty is made plain. As has been often said, slavery is nothing more nor less than a state of war perpetuated between masters and slaves. It originated in war, when the prisoners taken in battle or the captives seized in conquered cities were reduced to slavery. The African slave trade has always been supplied with victims by incessant wars between the tribes; the prisoners being regularly enslaved and then retained in the country or sold to the traders. Slavery is thus perpetuated captivity, as when a few years since, the Algerines reduced their white captives to slavery. The slaves have therefore a perfect right to do what other captives have a right to do; what any oppressed nation has a right to do. They may resort, in a body, to revolution; if peaceable measures are in vain, and if they have any reasonable prospect of success; that is, provided they can act unitedly with sufficient intelligence and courage, and with adequate resources of attack, defence and subsistence. This will not be denied by any who defend the

course of our own fathers, or who believe in the right of revolution *on the part of communities*. If they were to do this, I see not but that it would be as proper for others to go to their aid, as it was for Lafayette to come from France to assist our struggling fathers. Yea, more may be true. If it were previously *certain* that they had sufficient resources and were prepared to rise and successfully take and defend their rights, provided a leader could be secured from abroad, or a small body of effective auxiliaries could aid them at the first and most perilous moment, it would be difficult to prove wrong upon those who should supply this single deficiency. Indeed if it was right for the civilized world to interfere by force of arms to put an end to the oppression practiced in the Barbary States, or if French intervention would be right in the Papal States, it would not be easy to show that there would be wrong in the forcible release of the slaves in the United States by civilized nations that should have the power. But where no such prospect of success exists, mere individual enterprises, or small combinations for violent resistance, are inexpedient and wrong, being condemned by sound reason and by the explicit teaching of the Scriptures. Those who in such case "take the sword" must, as our Lord warned Peter in similar circumstances, expect to "perish by the sword."

If the slave cannot effect a quiet and peaceable escape, as Paul, with the assistance of the disciples, did from Damascus, he must submit patiently to the wrong, must be industrious, honest and meek, must endeavor to conciliate the favor and promote the good of the master, and must thus recommend the religion of Jesus and lighten as far as possible the burdens of himself and fellows. This was the uniform advice and command of the apostles, opposed though they were to slavery.— See Ep. 6: 5-8, Colos. 3: 22-25. 1. Tim.

6: 1-5, 1. Pet. 2: 18-20. And those from without who sympathize with the slave, must be governed by the same principle, abstaining from violence, and resorting to moral and religious means; prayer, preaching, printing and the ballot box. The spirit of benevolence to all concerned requires this course.

Judged by these obvious rules, the expedition of John Brown into the State of Virginia cannot be justified, whether it were for insurrection, or for the forcible abduction of slaves. Not that slavery is right, or slave law at all valid, or a slaveholding government, *so far forth*, anything more than organized piracy; but only that the tendency of such enterprises is to beget universal bitterness of feeling, to add to the sufferings of the slaves, to create new obstacles in the way of those who are seeking their peaceful emancipation, to cause the useless death of many individuals and to end in disastrous failure.

The slaves of our land, however much more oppressed than our fathers, have not their means of successful revolution, nor even those which were enjoyed by their own kindred in St. Domingo. They are vastly outnumbered by the white population, are without arms, are undisciplined, ignorant, without mutual understanding, destitute of money or resources of any kind, and unfit, therefore, for revolutionary enterprises, except to co-operate with a powerful invading army. Indeed the best indication of good sense which they have ever given, was in their refusing to unite in John Brown's rash undertaking. It were well if their prudence could be imitated by those who sympathize with them. Gordian knots are not always to be cut by the sword. No one has a right to sacrifice himself or others in mad enterprises.

And then it must be remembered, that though thus powerless for good, an insur-

rection of the slaves would be mighty for evil. They could not indeed conquer the whites in war, but must ultimately, without powerful help from abroad, be slaughtered by thousands, and they would be unable to establish and maintain a government of their own; but then they could at first rob and burn, destroy and murder; they could easily let loose the passions of hell, and like so many black fiends outrage and massacre helpless women and children; they could desolate the face of the country; they could maintain a long, desultory strife from out of forests and swamps and mountains; and thus they could bring ruin upon the South, and commit atrocities at the very thought of which our blood runs cold. And can we take any delight in such a prospect?—Does it offer any hope to humanity, and promise a blessing to the world superior to that which could be secured by peaceful and religious means? Were it not infinitely better to secure national repentance, and the consent of all sections and classes to emancipation? I cannot sympathize, then, with any project which looks to a servile insurrection. It would not benefit the slave, and it would be a hell on earth to the whites. It is not the way of Christianity, but of blind passion and diabolical revenge.

John Brown's expedition, therefore, if it was tainted with such a design, (which he denies and I think truthfully,) or if it legitimately tended in that direction, is only to be condemned. We have not yet exhausted peaceful measures; indeed, (I say it to our shame,) we have scarcely begun to use them. No door was open, promising to a sober judgment success in revolutionary attempts; for the requisite resources were not available from within or from without. The direct result has been death to John Brown and to not a few others, both among his associates and his opponents, and the stirring of fiery

passion in all sections of the land, the possible prelude to a terrible fratricidal conflict, while not a slave has been set at liberty.

So much for the *enterprise*, and now for the *man*! Men must not always be judged by their enterprises; because these latter may be either better or worse than their authors. Bad men may engage in noble achievements, and good men may become so deluded as to embark in rash, foolish and even wicked undertakings; especially when they are moved by deep sympathy with human suffering, or by strong indignation at heinous crime. There is such a thing as hallucination in enthusiastic minds which dwell exclusively upon a single exciting topic. While we condemn therefore as a matter of judgment, the expedition in which John Brown came to his end, we may still find reason not only to sympathize with his desire to overthrow slavery, but also to acquit the man of evil intent and even to admire him as in spirit one of the few heroes of history. There are many things to be taken into account in estimating the part which John Brown took in this sad matter.

First of all, we are to remember his native character. Enough has already come to light to show that from a boy, John Brown was marked by a peculiar nobility of character. The sternest integrity, the highest sense of justice and honor, the most tender and womanly compassion, and yet the coolest daring and the most unflinching fortitude—these were his well known qualities. And they not only fitted him for perilous enterprises, but naturally suggested them in the cause of humanity. A certain class of errors imply nobility of character. A mean, selfish man would never have embarked in such an undertaking. It was the impulsive, generous-hearted Peter that drew his sword and cut off the ear of the high priest's servant. And if he had cut off his head, would the

act have been murder? Yet religious editors have called John Brown a murderer?

Next we must call to mind what American slavery is, in all its vileness and in all its audacity, and what must have been the feelings of such a man as John Brown, when he had meditated upon its outrages for years, had seen its power increasing, had long identified himself with the nearly four millions of its victims, and in view of the apathy of the church and the greed of the slaveholders, had come to despair of its peaceful termination. Said Edmund Burke, in one of his noted speeches, when apologizing for any undue warmth of expression, "Something must be pardoned to the spirit of liberty." We can afford to be lenient towards extreme action against American slavery, when we remember that John Wesley pronounced it to be "the vilest beneath the sun," and when we think how at times its atrocities have made our own blood boil in our veins, and it seemed as though we must arm at once and rush to the relief of the oppressed.

And to this again we must add the peculiar experience and training which John Brown had in Kansas, and for which he was indebted to the slaveholding States and the Federal Government. It was in Kansas that he learned to use arms against slavery, and those arms were taken up in defence of the friends of freedom against the lawless and unprovoked violence of the slaveholders who invaded the territory from the neighboring State of Missouri in armed bands, seized upon the ballot boxes, imposed a fraudulent legislature and a tyrannical code of laws, and determined to force slavery upon that fair domain contrary to the will of the people. When driven to resistance by the robberies, arsons and murders of the slaveholders, his own son having been cruelly slain by them, and when under his lead the war had been successfully turned against those

who commenced it, is it singular that John Brown should have judged that as the slaveholders had appealed to arms, he might justly try them hereafter at their chosen tribunal and press them with their own weapons? If his attention was turned in the wrong direction, in the choice of means wherewith to combat slavery, who were his teachers and who is responsible for his progress in the school of arms?

Nor must we forget, in this connection, the stimulus that such a conception would receive from the numerous "filibuster expeditions and slave-trade ventures of the South. If public meetings could be held and newspapers printed, to advocate piracy in two different forms, though both in the interest of slavery, and the State and Federal governments connive at the same, does it manifest a remarkable deterioration of morals, that John Brown came to the conclusion that what could be done for slavery might equally be done for freedom? that on the homœopathic principle that "like cures like," those who favored filibuster expeditions to Cuba and Central America, might be cured by a similar expedition to "extend the area of freedom" in Virginia? Yes, in Virginia, of all other States, the home of Henry and Washington and Jefferson—the State that has for its broad seal the representation of a freeman trampling on the prostrate body of an oppressor, with the motto above, "*Sic semper tyrannis!*"—"Thus may it always be to tyrants!"

And from whom but from slaveholders did John Brown obtain the suggestion of the leading feature of his enterprise? Did not the Missourians, on their way to invade Kansas, break open the public arsenal and supply themselves with weapons? Did not Governor Wise himself, under whose administration John Brown has just been hung, declare in 1856, during the last presidential canvass, that if John C. Fremont were elected President, the South would

immediately seize the United States arsenal at Harper's Ferry and not allow it to remain in the possession of the Federal government? No doubt this was the hint that led to the enterprise that has resulted so disastrously; and within a few days the same threat has been repeated by another leading Virginian with reference to the probable result of the next presidential election. Thus the men who hang John Brown announce their purpose to imitate his conduct. What was treason in him, changes to patriotism in them! Can that conduct, then, stamp him with infamy, even in their eyes?

And if he indulged any idea of a serious and general movement for freedom, as possibly arising from his undertaking, in case of an armed contest, he may have deemed success more probable than we are prepared to pronounce it. He may have over-estimated the readiness of men in the free States to rush to his aid when the conflict should have fully begun, and he may have been deceived as to the readiness of the slaves to co-operate with any party that might promise liberty. His own success previously in Kansas may have blinded him to the difficulties of this new scheme, so that it appeared to him benevolent and feasible in all its aspects.

And then once more—who can tell how much secret faith he may have had in interventions of Providence in his behalf as the deliverer of the oppressed. His mind was just of the cast to imagine this, direct descendant as he was of the Pilgrims, from the old May Flower stock, and kindred to the men who followed Cromwell, "trusting in God and keeping their powder dry." He seems to have had a dash of superstitious fanaticism, strengthened by a misuse of Old Testament ideas and practices, and may easily have supposed that God had raised him up like one of the ancient judges, to deliver his oppressed people. And he knew, moreover, that

in the first outbreak of a great revolution, the earliest movements always partake of a seemingly seditious and illegal character; for the laws never make provision for revolutions, and those who lead in the first overt acts of discontent are usually slaughtered without mercy as mere insurrectionists, after which the smothered coals ignite and the flame of indignation and rebellion kindles into a universal conflagration. Our own revolution was introduced by riotous resistance to the use of stamped paper, the destruction of the tea in Boston harbor, the "Boston massacre" (to the funeral of whose victims the whole city turned out) and the petty skirmishes of Concord and Lexington, no war as yet having been declared.

These considerations, while not justifying John Brown's invasion of Virginia, as an act in itself proper, may easily persuade us that to his own mind it appeared right, so that he was conscientious in undertaking it. We may then view him as a man without holding him severely responsible for this error of judgment. When we judge *him*, in his personal character, we are to remember also that he was a professor of religion, a member of an Old School Presbyterian church, nor has any one a word to offer against the reality and fervency of his piety, aside from his conduct in making armed resistance to slavery. And if officers and privates in the armies of different nations, who make war their profession and place themselves at the disposal of their respective governments to fight battles any where and for any purpose, if in the judgment of our conservative divines and editors, such men may give evidence of genuine piety, and after their death on the battle ground, their biographies may be written and widely circulated by religious publishers, it may be allowed us to believe in the possible piety of John Brown, who though he shed blood, did it not for hire, nor for

glory, but thought that he wielded "the sword of the Lord and of Gideon," for the deliverance of the oppressed. Indeed it is difficult to read the accounts given even by his enemies, respecting his personal purity, dignity, calmness, self-possession, truthfulness, fortitude, and adherence to principle, without believing him to have been in some respects a very eminent Christian, despite his errors. He was characteristically a man of prayer, and like the old Puritans, prayed before he fought, and fought all the harder in the remembrance of his prayer. His courage was evidently the courage of faith, the fear of man being lost in the fear of God; while like all genuine heroes, he proved his greatness by the humanity which tempered his daring. Nobler sentiments have fallen from no man, than were uttered by him in his conversation, in his letters and in his address to the court. What, for instance, can exceed the moral sublimity of the words contained in his letter to his old friend, Rev. H. L. Vail, "I have enjoyed much of life, as I was enabled to discover the secret of this somewhat early. It has been in making the prosperity and happiness of others my own; so that really I have had a great deal of prosperity. I am very prosperous still." And how lofty the faith of his declaration at the close of one of his letters to his wife, "I cannot remember a night so dark as to have hindered the coming day; nor a storm so furious and dreadful, as to prevent the return of warm sunshine, and a cloudless sky." His whole demeanor, up to the last moment, gave evidence of reverence for God, love to man, and a heart in which was "the peace that passeth understanding." Let his faults have been what they may, John Brown, so far as we can judge him, was a genuine Christian. He did in life what he thought God called him to do, and when he was sentenced to death,

meekly accepted it as an act of Providence and as God's intimation that he "was worth inconceivably more to hang, than for any other purpose." Who that has read the "Prison Meditations," of John Bunyan will not be reminded of the parallel declaration of that immortal dreamer:

"The prison very sweet to me,  
Hath been since I came here;  
*And so would also hanging be*  
*If God should there appear."*

I would recommend the ministers and editors who rail at John Brown to read this entire work of Bunyan, and explain if they can, the coincidence in the spirit, the sentiments and the language of the two men. Thus, in the very spirit of the text, he signified, that if, as a single grain of wheat, he was useless for food, he would at least answer to plant. We stand too near him and have too much at stake in the great question which he sought to solve, for us to judge him truly. Future generations will do him ample justice; and history will number him among her heroes. Yes, the time may come when Virginia herself will be proud of his monument.

And what will be the eventual result of his deeds and of his death? If partly evil, by man's imperfection, yet largely good, by God's overruling. The error of his judgment will be eclipsed by the glory of his principles; we shall forget his mistaken appeal to arms, and think only of his character, his motives, his sacrifices, and his death. It is not in vain that John Brown has died; in fact as a savior, in spirit as a martyr. Through his deeds unconsciously he taught, his heroic daring, and his sublime contempt of death, ending by the hand of the executioner, will render him immortal. They have killed him, but they have given new life to his principles. It is worthy of notice how strong was John Brown's own faith in such a result. His words in the letter to Rev. Mr. Vail, already referred to, were:

"As I believe most firmly that God reigns, I can not believe that anything I have *done, suffered, or may suffer, will be lost to the cause of God or humanity.* And before I began my work at Harper's Ferry, I felt assured that in the worst event it would certainly *pay.* I often expressed that belief; and I can now see no possible cause to alter my mind. I am not as yet in the *main*, at all disappointed. I have been a *good deal* disappointed as it regards *myself*, in not keeping up to *my own plans*, but I now feel entirely reconciled to that even; for God's plan was infinitely better, *no doubt*, or I should have kept to my own. Had Sampson kept to his determination not to tell Delilah wherein his great strength lay, he would probably never have overturned the house. I did not tell Delilah, but I was induced to act *very contrary* to my *better judgment*; and I have lost my *two* noble boys, and other friends, if not my *two eyes.*"

The thrill which has run through the nation has at least startled it from lethargy and made it conscious that the grand problem of its own continued existence lies involved in this very question of slavery. Shame has already crimsoned millions of cheeks, that we have cherished thus long in the world's presence, and before the deserts of Europe, an institution so vile, as to tempt men like John Brown to sacrifice their lives in vain attempts at its overthrow, and yet so weak withal, that its defenders quake at the sight of their own shadows and it can only be sustained by force of arms and the grim display of the gallows. And must not these events lead to a renewed and more earnest discussion of the subject in church and in state, at the North and at the South? Has not the fact been revealed, that beneath the South is the volcano of a slave insurrection, the fatal eruption of which may come either from the prompting of hope, or the wild phrensy of despair? Has not the panic of an entire State at the invasion of a non-resist's guard,—a fact not at all ludicrous in its indication of the

fearful liabilities of the South, but only as contrasted with the frequent boasts, the insulting threats and the assumed courage of her politicians—has not this panic, I say, proved the weakness of our country in case of a serious invasion by some powerful foe, as also the horrors which hang over the South in case of a dissolution of the Union resulting in civil war? Must not Christians likewise be led to inquire, whether God is not thus rebuking their unfaithfulness, and warning them that their recreancy may lead to desperate measures on the part of the slaves and their sympathizers? Who does not see in these things an occasion for alarm, lest God, giving us up to our sins, should allow human passion to kindle on both sides, until by mutual acts of mad violence, our country is made the scene of terrible carnage, and slavery is destroyed in a second Red Sea, but this time of blood?

Our hope is in God and in His Church. Let Christians arise and with one voice demand that this sin of oppression shall be put away. Let them use all peaceful and appropriate means to spread light and to bring all classes to concur in emancipation, as equally the right of the slave, the duty of the master, the necessity of the nation, and the command of God. Let them see especially that the church itself is pure from this sin; that the ministry fails not in the proclamation of the truth, and that the membership does not embrace those who claim property in their fellow-men. Then may we hope for national repentance and an escape from divine judgments.

But if all warning be despised, if the Church of the living God will not come to the help of the oppressed, if even ministers of the gospel shall be more concerned to condemn the errors and faults of those who are earnestly seeking the overthrow of slavery, than to expose the enormities of that system of abominations, we may

justly expect that God will work through other and more terrible instrumentalities. For I suppose that none of my hearers is skeptical on the point that American slavery is doomed to destruction. *God will destroy it.* "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" He will first offer the work in its more peaceful form to His Church; if the Church despises or neglects it, He will make use of other providential methods, human wrath, war, bloodshed, until He has taught the world a lesson of justice and humanity through us, as He did three thousand years ago through Egypt. The crisis is a solemn one, for God's purposes are ripening fast, and I need not remind you how rapidly His work comes to a close, when "*this set time*" has arrived. The long period of preparation is drawing to an end, and the vials of wrath are ready to be poured out. Everything betokens a speedy and terrible struggle between liberty and slavery, and what may happen to our beloved country in the conflict no tongue can predict. Now is the time for the people of God to lift up their voices in prayer and to put forth their hands in effort. Now is the time for the ministers of religion to rush in, like Aaron of old, with their burning censers between the living and the dead, that we perish not by divine judgments.—Numb. 16: 40—42. Now is the time for God in His search to find the men to "make up the hedge" and to "stand in the gap" before Him for the land, that He should not destroy it—Ezek. 22: 30, 30. If such shall be the result of the sacrifice of John Brown, it will appear that he was a seed of liberty divinely planted at this critical period that by "dying" he "might bring forth much fruit."







*Nathaniel* Prof. James Russell Lowell  
1859  
with compliments of  
Henry G. Deming.

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**TWO SERMONS**

ON

**SLAVERY AND ITS HERO-VICTIM.**

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THE INIQUITY:

A

SERMON

PREACHED IN

THE FIRST CHURCH, DORCHESTER,

ON SUNDAY, DEC. 11, 1859.

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BY NATHANIEL HALL.

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BOSTON:

PRINTED BY JOHN WILSON & SON,

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DORCHESTER, Dec. 13, 1859.

Rev. NATHANIEL HALL.

DEAR SIR,— We are desirous of having your very acceptable discourses of last Sunday preserved in a permanent form, that they may thereby reach many who have not had an opportunity of hearing them; and we feel sure that we express the wishes of a large number of your parishioners and friends in asking copies of them for publication.

Very respectfully and truly yours,

THOS. C. WALES.  
THOMAS GROOM.  
WM. E. COFFIN.  
WILLIAM POPE, Jr.  
FRANKLIN KING.

JNO. H. ROBINSON.  
ELISHA T. LORING.  
DANIEL DENNY.  
FRED. W. G. MAY.  
HENRY G. DENNY.

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DORCHESTER, Dec. 15, 1859.

GENTLEMEN,—

In deference to your expressed judgment of them, I place the Sermons you request for publication, in your hands, for that purpose,—though written with no such thought.

Very respectfully,

NATHANIEL HALL.

To THOS. C. WALES and others.



## S E R M O N .

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Luke x. 27: "THOU SHALT LOVE THY NEIGHBOR AS THYSELF."

John xiii. 34: "A NEW COMMANDMENT I GIVE UNTO YOU, THAT YE LOVE ONE ANOTHER AS I HAVE LOVED YOU."

FOR reasons which the past week has furnished, I take for my subject, this morning, that always, to so many, distasteful one, — now, to some of you, I fear, more especially so, — the subject of American Slavery.

I am happy in the belief that I possess your confidence in the worthiness of my motive in presenting this subject in the past, so far at least as to lead you to bear with me now, in the persuasion that only a feeling of bounden allegiance to a great and holy cause impels me, and my desire, in the present excited condition of the public mind, the conflict of opinion and feeling among equally wise, and, I doubt not, equally conscientious men, to throw my contribution of light, though it be but a single ray, on the path of duty respecting it. I feel that it is the pulpit's *time* to speak; that, instead of withholding itself because



of this excitement around it, all the more for this should it speak. It is *always* its time to speak on this subject. It is a subject bound upon it by most solemn obligations. And had it, the pulpit of the Free States, been true to those obligations in the past; had it not been faithless to the great moral question of the age in this country; had it not, as a general fact (I say not from what motives; God knows), had it not practically ignored it, and given it over to the politician, and to those outside the church, who have taken it up because the church would not; had the pulpit lent itself with heart and might to the antislavery movement, — I believe, before God, this most unhappy and fearfully threatening condition of things now upon us would never have existed. And, in saying this, the assumption is not that preachers have an especial competency to discuss the subject, in all its relations; that there is more wisdom and intelligence in the pulpit for this than in the hall of legislation, the forum, the editorial chair. Let it be granted that there is far less. The subject has other than political and economic relations, which are likely in the places named to be the only ones discussed, and not without partisan and unworthy bias. The subject has relations also to morality and religion, — most intimate, most direct; and, supposing *these* relations to get a fair consideration in the places spoken of, how could it supersede the neces-

sity of the pulpit's discussing them, or excuse its silence upon them? But we well know they do *not* get such discussion there; that these relations are very generally put out of sight, as if they did not exist; or are recognized but to be scoffed at. The preacher should — his calling presumes it of him — see more clearly than other men what the claims of morality and religion are with regard to this question, as to others. Freed by his position from an active participation in the dizzying pursuit of life's meaner good; dealing by profession with absolute and unchanging verities, — he occupies, surely, a vantage-ground above other men for such clearer vision. Should he not tell what he sees? The *theory* of the pulpit is, that it stands amidst the eddying tides and blinding mists of the mortal shores, a lighthouse, flamed by the Eternal Truth, to warn and guide the endangered voyager; to remind and keep him in sight of interests higher than earth's, and more lasting than time's; that it stands a present Christ, a perpetually vocalized Gospel, with its pointings to duty, with its affirmations of the higher law, with its rebukes of sin, alike private and public, no less than with its consoling assurances, its cheering hopes, and heavenly promises.

Will men never choose to discriminate between the treatment of this subject politically and the treatment of it ethically? which latter is all the pulpit claims a

right to do. Will they never cease to assume, that, because it has become involved with party politics, it has therefore passed from the province of the religious teacher; and that all treatment of it by him, however strictly on his own ground, is entitled to the epithet of "political preaching"? I undertake to say that there never was a more senseless assumption put forth in all Christendom, — one more to be resisted, if need were, to the very death, — than that the pulpit, standing as the visible exponent of God's truth and law, should have nothing to say in reference to the fact that millions of human beings, in the nation in which it stands, are forcefully deprived of their natural rights, and crushed beneath the heel of a lawless oppression; should have no words of pity for the helpless victims of the wrong, none of rebuke for the authors and abettors of it; that the *pulpit* should have none! — standing in the name of Him whose commandment is, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," expanded from its Hebrew limitations into "Love one another as I have loved you," — made thus, as well he called it, "a *new* commandment," alike in the breadth and depth of its meaning.

Consider its meaning, — the breadth of it, — "that ye love one another." The Jew loved his own, — those of his own lineage, people, brotherhood, church. The Gentiles were "dogs:" the Samaritans, though included in the same national boundaries, were hated

and despised. The Jew was not so different in this from men of other lands and later days. The world still loves "its own." What barriers do differences of nationality, caste, condition, color, interpose to the outflow of our love! Did Christ mean it so? He has answered that question in the parable of the Samaritan. He has answered it on the cross. Fraternity, with him, was more than consanguinity. Neighborhood was more than juxtaposition. "The neighbor was the suffering man, though at the farthest pole." *Humanity* he loved. "He died for *all*."

Consider, again, its meaning, — the depth of it, — "that ye *love* one another." Did he mean by "love" a barren sentiment, — a feeling whose only fruit is verbal, unpractical, deedless? Happily, we are not left to question what he meant. "As I have loved you" decides it. His love was heartfelt sympathy; it was helpful service; it was life-giving devotedness. "He *died* for all."

And now let us take this "new commandment" of the world's Teacher and Exemplar, at whose tribunal we all must stand, — are standing now, — by whose law are judged; this "*new* commandment," and yet which is but a fulfilling of that thundered from Sinai, but an illumined transcript of that whispered in the universal heart; let us take it, and confront with it the fact before us, — that dark, dread fact, growing darker and more dreadful with every year and month,

— those millions of the enslaved on our soil to-day, helpless victims of human passion, greed, avarice, lust ; made so, kept so, by a nation's power, and an acquiescent public opinion ; decreed by a nation's judiciary to have “no rights which white men are bound to respect ;” millions, with us in all the attributes of an intellectual, moral, social, religious nature ; for whom, as much as for us, God meant his choicest gifts, and, among them, that which makes so many of his other gifts alone of worth, alone of access, — *freedom* ; for whom, as much as for us, Christ came and died ; whom, as much as us, he loves ; yea, with whom he chose to identify himself, saying, “Inasmuch as ye do it or do it not” (the needed favors in your power to do) “to such as these, ye do it, or not, unto me.”

Tell me, can you gather here as Christian believers, can you accept this volume as containing the will and law of Heaven, and say that these have no claim on you for the action, sympathy, consideration, speech, whereby you may possibly serve them ; no claim on you to do whatever you may, consistently with other claims, to lift the yoke of their oppression, to return them their stolen “birthright,” — if that can be called *stolen* which they never had, — and allow them to feel the dignity of self-ownership, the dignity, and the incentives, and the privileges, and the chances ? Can you say, in this religious light, in hearing of the Christian call, in sight of the

Christian guide, in hearing of the advent song of Bethlehem, soon again to be sung in all our churches, — “good-will to men ;” in sight of the closing act on Calvary, where good-will to men could no further go ; can you say that the case of these hapless bondmen is no concern of yours ; is not for you to act for, or consider, or be troubled about ?

I know not how it is, kind friends. I do not claim, God knows, to have a warmer heart than others, or a truer. I do not believe I have. I see those around me now to whom I look up, in respect and love, for their kindliness of heart and generosity of deed, and yet who do not feel as I do on this subject. I have, probably, touched no chord within their breasts by my appeal. There are women, the kindest of mothers, who, when they sing their babes to sleep, and put their hearts into that “good-night” kiss, and turn away in the unfearing security that no hand but God’s can take them from their arms, have no thought for her, who, with heart no less tender than their own in its maternal instincts, with sensibilities no less attuned to love’s sweet music, stands within the slave-mart, in the agony that only a mother’s heart can know, and looks for the last time on those whom God has given her, not because death has taken them, — she could feel almost happy if that were all, — but because she must witness their living burial in the pit of slavery, with not even the satisfaction of knowing

how dark and deep their descent shall be ; — takes her parting look ; feels, for the last time, their warm breath against her cheek ; and then gazes after them, as, with reverted faces and sobbing wail, they go, until sight and hearing have lost their hold of them, and she sinks in a despair which finds no sympathy but with God, no restorative but time.

There are mothers, fathers, who are touched to tears in the knowledge of a bereavement come to others, by death, of a beloved daughter, measuring the sorrow of those parental hearts by what their fond affections tell them would be their own, should she, sitting beside them in the sweet charm of opening womanhood, be taken thus ; who are touched by the mere recital of such a loss, though the parties were strangers to them, ay, though the case were known as fiction ; and who yet have no tears and no thought for those who see, in the growing beauty which God has stamped on form and feature of their maiden child, but the *signet of her doom*, — a doom darker than death, and against which they cannot lift an opposing finger ; they dare not lift a protesting appeal.

There *are* those, we well know, in all our communities, who wilfully shut out the whole subject of slavery from their minds ; who will not give it a fair hearing, nor any hearing, if they can help it. There are those, we know, who defend it, — on the ground

of the alleged inherent inferiority of the African race ; of the averred condition of the slave, as physically comfortable ; of the precedents for slavery which the Bible furnishes ; of the benefits, in point of civilization and Christianization, which slavery confers on its benighted victims. There are these ! Let them be. Of course, the appeal of slavery's victims and slavery's wrongs would be of no avail with such. It is of *others* that I ask why it should so greatly be so, in my utter inability to understand it. The commercial consideration, I know, is strong, very strong, in and about our cities ; which says "Hush !" — for business' sake. The prejudice against color is strong, making the same circumstances less affecting as attaching to a negro than to a white man. The fear of disunion is strong ; which says, "At all costs, that must be prevented." Respect for constitutional obligations is strong ; which says, "It is in the *bond* that slavery shall be tolerated : it should be." The inertia of conservatism is strong ; which says, "Let alone ; things will work themselves right : in trying to hasten matters, you may only make bad worse." The prejudice against abolitionism is strong, allowing the attention to be turned aside, by what are called its exaggerations and fanaticisms, from a fair consideration of the subject. I know all this, and more. But it does not explain to me the failure, to the extent to which it is apparently true, of the antislavery appeal. I can un-



derstand that considerations like these should serve to deaden, in some degree, its force; but *not* that, at times, in view of the simple facts on which that appeal is based, the native sentiments of the soul should not heave the superincumbent mass, and flame out and up, forgetful of every thing but justice and mercy.

And I confess that I am forced at times, in view of the public apathy before the facts of slavery's inhumanity and wrong, the seemingly utter obliviousness to the claims of its victims to a consideration and regard, to ask, "Is all humanity gone from us in this direction? Is the milk of human kindness dried up within us? the sentiment of justice paralyzed?" Where shall we find any marked public recognition — any that is not shamefully inadequate — of the cruelty and crime of slavery, — our own slavery, the pet child of this American republic, — where, away from the abolition platform? Bless God it is *there*; though more is there which I wish were not. But *this* is there, — an open-mouthed plea for the slave, an open-mouthed condemnation of the wrong that makes him such. And none can tell how broad and deep — broadening and deepening — the influence for right and freedom and humanity which has gone forth from those earnest and devoted men and women.

Not, indeed, that such plea and condemnation are, literally, unheard elsewhere. But from how few

among the many pulpits of the land, from how few among its presses, from how few among its public men, is heard a bold, earnest, whole-souled expression of the Christian view and the Christian feeling, — the *humane* view, — in relation to this subject! One might reasonably suppose, that in a community like this, beneath the full blaze of gospel light from its beginnings; with such a history, revolutionary, puritanic, — its souls would be all aflame at the near presence, within the confederacy of which it forms a part, of four millions of human beings bound in the most abject form of bondage the world has known. How sadly far from it! I looked in vain in the applauded speech of a distinguished individual in Faneuil Hall, on Thursday last (I name it as an indication, and not as a personality), for the slightest evidence of a single heart-throb for the slave, of a single throe of righteous indignation at the crime of slavery. There were eloquent invocations of sympathy for the imperilled slave-owner, — imperilled as a consequence of a Heaven-defying sin against humanity; but none, no word of sympathy, no verbal remembrance, of those millions so *sinned against*. There were most earnest deprecations of bloodshed by servile insurrection; but no allusion to the blood daily shed by the wearing, wasting over-toil in cane-field and rice-swamp. None, of course, would object to the invocation of sympathy for the South. God knows,

as itself knows, how large its claim for it. They are our brethren there, our "neighbors." We are to show them the love both of sympathy and of service; but *not*, I protest, *not* to the forgetfulness of the *victims* of their oppression. *They* are no less our brethren, no less our neighbors; *more* entitled to our sympathy and service for their very ignorance and weakness and long-endured abuses. Which would Christ, think you, have soonest remembered? We should sympathize with the South; but as we do with those who are reaping the natural and inevitable fruits of their transgression. It has sown the wind to reap the whirlwind. It has seeded its soil with violence; and what but violence, unless hindered by a repentant righteousness, can spring upon it? Are the laws of the moral universe abrogated or suspended in favor of this republic? We should sympathize with the South; not, indeed, in Pharasaic assumption, as if we were the unsinning and the true, — God forbid! our own self-convicted hearts forbid! — but as those who verily are not guiltless of our brothers' blood, in so far as, by act or influence, wilfully or thoughtlessly, individually or collectively, we may have aided or consented to the inhumanity and the wrong; as those who are sharing, and are yet to share more largely, of its bitter fruits; and who are ready, in the spirit of a fraternal good-will, to unite in any effort, which conscience can approve, for its

abolishment. But let us not mock the Eternal Justice by consenting to palter with it, to palliate it; to be, for friendship's sake, or interest's sake, or safety's sake, any longer, however indirectly, its willing and unprotesting upholders. The chief ground of fear for the North at this juncture — what is it? That by its honest-hearted sympathy with an heroic man, who, in the name of God, assailed their institution, it may provoke the South to disunion? Is it not rather, far rather, that for the sake of the Union, in self-interest or timidity, it will consent to farther concessions of its principles and its manhood; increasing thus, how surely, the real evil; debauching yet more the public conscience; delaying a reckoning which must needs come, only to make it the more overwhelming at last?

The word, I feel, which God is speaking to the slaveholders of this land and their abettors, through that most remarkable event which has so startled them, from that scaffold in whose blood they seek in vain to stifle their alarm, — that word is “Repent, reform.” And that word — as God's, not its own; not in arrogancy, not in passion — should the North take up, as the burden and spirit of its appeal. It is the kind word, the friendly word, the saving word. But, heeded or unheeded by the South, with the North should be the unalterable decision, We will no longer be partners in the upholding and cherishing of

this accursed barbarism. We will no longer be tied up to a complicity in this intolerable outrage and affront to Christianity and the age.

Let us remember, friends, that this impersonality, "the North," is composed of individuals; that we are among them; that, as such, we have duties in relation to this matter of slavery, which it becomes us religiously to fulfil. And, first, we should acquaint ourselves — it is the bounden duty of every one of us, man and woman — with the facts of slavery, to the extent practicable. How many never read a publication, never hear a lecture, touching this subject! They are without the true feeling about it, because without knowledge. We should cherish the feeling which knowledge would beget, not morbidly, not fanatically, but in natural, healthy, Christ-like sympathies for the wronged, and in holy detestation of the wrong. It is the very spirit of God. Quench it not. We should give action to the heart's promptings in doing whatever and all we may, in and through the spirit of Christ, for slavery's downfall and extinction. And, withal, we should give ourselves to prayer, — for the oppressed, for the oppressor, for light, strength, compassion, patience, as our own need with regard to them; the prayer of faith and trust in Him, who, amid clouds and darkness, has justice and judgment as the habitation of his throne; all whose attributes are one in their opposition to oppression; and who,

sooner or later, will show himself to have been on the side of truth and freedom and right, in the ever-waging conflict of these with falsehood and despotism and iniquity.

The work is God's. We can be but his instruments: we *can* be such. "Wherefore, put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand in the evil day, and, having done all, to stand."



THE MAN, — THE DEED, — THE EVENT :

A

# S E R M O N

PREACHED IN

THE FIRST CHURCH, DORCHESTER

ON SUNDAY, DEC. 4, AND REPEATED DEC. 11, 1859.

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BY NATHANIEL HALL.

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## S E R M O N.

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John xi. 50: "IT IS EXPEDIENT FOR US THAT ONE MAN SHOULD DIE FOR THE PEOPLE."

**T**HE American Pulpit can have but one theme to-day. To decline, for any other, that given in the public tragedy whose shadow is yet upon us, would be to turn away from the very call of God, as heard in his providence, — heard in the awakened minds and quickened sensibilities of a people. So, at least, do I feel it, and must do accordingly. I have forborne to speak hitherto of the affair thus consummated, not because it has not had for me an absorbing interest, but because I wished to wait until that consummation should have passed, until it should wear its death-crown, and be given over in its wholeness, as now it is, to the keeping of history. I have forborne too, let me add, because I have stood in awe — as I do still — before an event so full of significance, so full of teaching, so full of God, lest I might not interpret it aright; lest in a human weakness, through

sympathy with the cause in whose interest it befell, I might be led to see in it more, or beneath the influence of contagious opinion, in a human weakness still, which suffers others' judgments to becloud the moral vision, I might see less, than in truth was there. I would simply see what is there, and tell what I see.

On Friday last, the 2d of December, a man, accused and convicted of capital offences against the laws of Virginia, was publicly executed therefor under those laws. What is there here to quicken the pulses of a nation? What is there in this, that the eyes of twenty millions of people should have been turned, on that day, to that scaffold, — some in tearful sympathy, some in exulting scorn, some in depressing fears, but all with a commanding *interest*; an interest which, for weeks before, had waited, as for nothing else, for the words spoken in his imprisonment, as the million-voiced press reported them, in every dwelling in the land? What is there in this, that the sudden death-knell of the patriarch-prince of American letters, laurelled with the purest admiration of three generations, should have been comparatively unnoticed, in anticipation of that of this sentenced felon? Let us expand that statement of the occurrence by its interconnected facts, and we shall see.

A man of threescore years, of New-England birth, of Puritan descent, and marked in youth and manhood

by the characteristic virtues of that noble stock; a man nurtured upon the Bible; a man of prayer; a man in whom the religious element was the ruling and inciting one; a man, the uncompromising sternness of whose integrity was in union with a childlike simplicity and a self-denying benevolence, — this man, for following out the impulse of that benevolence, in a certain way, towards a certain class; for putting his religion into forceful deeds; for obeying the inward call, as doubly heard in conscience and in heart; for seeking to give freedom to an outcast race, whose oppressions he had borne, through a score of years, as if they were his own; for “remembering,” in the only way that seemed to him effective, — in the way, as he felt, which Heaven ordered him, — “them that are in bonds, as bound with them;” for striking a sacrilegious blow at the Dagon of a nation’s worship, whereto government, society, religion, commerce, law, obsequiously bow down, — *this man, for this*, on the day and place aforesaid, was hung as a malefactor; and hence, in these added facts of the case, hence essentially, that wide-spread interest and deep sensation the event produced. It was the man, it was the motive, it was the object; it was the deed, not in itself, but in its revelations; in its results manifest, and those, far more, of which it is the prophecy and the harbinger, at once the seed and the germinating influence.

The man and the event, — they offer themselves as distinct sources of instruction and impression. There are differences of opinion respecting the man ; though only, I believe, — which is most remarkable, — in this particular manifestation of himself. But, let these differences be what they may, while they will affect the moral teaching of their related point, — the man in his deed, — making it more or less, or not at all, impressive, it need not affect, in the least, the lessons from the *event*, — the event as such, and in its attendant revelations and practical suggestiveness.

First, the man and the deed ; the man *in* his deed. I see in him — as may already have been inferred — an heroic nobleness ; a moral intrepidity ; an unflinching conscientiousness ; a religious self-devotion ; a resolute pursuance, for years, of a purpose to which his soul was wedded by holiest ties ; which he had espoused, before Heaven, as divine ; had sworn to be faithful to, through all hazards, at any cost, unto death ; and for which, at last, in a lofty disregard of personal consequences, in an unquestioning confidence in a righteous God, he hazarded and gave his life. It is the *motive* stamps the deed ; it is the *purpose* makes the man, morally regarded. Call him, if you will, mistaken, foolish, — mistaken as to the justifiableness of the means employed, foolish in his estimate of the efficiency of those means in relation to his end. What has it to do with the moral rightness and wisdom of

the man? If you deny him the attribute of a prudential rationality, you must accord him the virtues, in glorious measure, of courage, magnanimity, humaneness, truth. If you deny him a perfect apprehension of the Christian law, you must accord to him a whole-souled allegiance to what he *did* apprehend as such. If you call him, in disparagement, an *Old-Testament* Christian, you must allow him to have been *that*: ay, and more than that he was; combining with a holy valor a philanthropy, which, in the choice of its objects and the disinterestedness of its aim, only Christianity could inspire. If you say he believed in a "God of battles," he believed, at any rate, in a God who battled for *right* as against wrong, for the *oppressed* as against the oppressor, and who puts swords into his servants' hands, to do, if need be, likewise.

*This*, at least, we *know* of John Brown,—that he allied himself, head and heart and hand, with the legally oppressed class in this country; that he saw, that he felt, as if they were his own, the wrongs they suffer, and gave his all, himself, for their deliverance. Whatever we may deny about him, of whatever we may be doubtful, *so much* we *know*. His veracity is unimpeachable; even his enemies confess, and stood in awe before it; and this *he* asserts of himself. His wife also, widow now, of noble worth, testifies to this feeling and purpose as among the deepest and dearest

of his heart. "He has borne," she says, "the yoke of the oppressed, as if upon his neck, for thirty years." Every thing known of him, every thing said of him, by reliable witnesses; his whole past; the interval, above all, of his imprisonment, and his sublimely-met end,—all force us to the belief, that in the spirit of a compassionating benevolence, joined with a fervid love of justice and of right, he had made it, by prayer and vow, the one leading object of his life, to emancipate, as best he might, the enslaved. Nor is there any thing to show that personal motives of any sort, of a character sordid or ambitious or revengeful, mingled at all with the highest—no, not even the *latter*—marvellous height of moral attainment, in view of his own heart-rending experience of the bereaving cruelties of the slave-power. *See him thus*, in this light alone, as one who, in the consciousness of a righteous cause, and in pity for an outcast and despised race, in a sublime recklessness opposed himself to a nation's prostituted power,—a recklessness which had in it, it may be, a higher wisdom, a truer sanity, seen from its providential point, than we yet can know;—see him thus, and how can we but honor him? If we honor those in all the ages who have dared and died for the oppressed; if we honor the martyrs for liberty on our own soil; nay, I speak it reverently, if we honor Christ, who identified himself with the poor and forsaken, and calls upon his follow-

ers to do so, in sacrificing service,—how can we but honor the memory of this executed man? See the man in his motive, and tell me why. Separate the circumstances which involve not the moral character of his enterprise from those which express it, and tell me why. God save us from that inability to discriminate between the mere form, providential or mistaken, of the manifestation of a principle, and its essential being and activity; from that prejudiced and perverted vision, which shall let any of his true heroes pass unmarked by us as such, whether in public or private life, seated in power or dangling from a gallows, crowned with success or crushed by failure! For myself, I rejoice that He has raised up such a one in the person of this humble man. I rejoice that He has startled a nation, given to selfish toils and demeaning indulgences and base expediences, by the unwonted apparition of a *man*; a man heroically earnest for righteousness' sake; a man daring to follow a principle, wheresoever it may lead; to put his religion into act, and take the consequences, though one be death. Some call this fanaticism; some call it madness. Would to God there were more of it in the world, call it what they may; more vital faith in principles, in God, in a God of righteousness, a present God, a helping God; a faith that would keep men from everlastingly calculating the probable and the expedient, as if there was no Being wiser and



stronger than they; as if right was not always the expedient, to abide by it the only success!

I hope to be understood, as one speaking on this subject is very likely not to be. I have spoken approvingly of the principles and motives of the man, as apart from the course he was led by these to adopt. That that course had the approval of his own conscience, that it seemed right to him, there can be no doubt; and while, in our judgment of it, we are allegiant to our truer view, as we deem it, of the Christian law, let us not do his memory the injustice to ascribe to him what he did not design. How does it appear, though so generally assumed, that he designed to employ force, aggressively and destructively, in the accomplishment of his purpose, or to incite the slaves to insurrection? On the contrary, he says of himself, in his speech before the court,—this man whose word was truth,—“I never did intend murder or treason, or the destruction of property, or to incite slaves to rebellion, or to make insurrection: I never encouraged men to do so, but always discouraged any idea of the kind.” He had given freedom to slaves elsewhere, “without,” as he says, “the snap of a gun.” He meant to do it here on a larger scale, but, if possible, at the same bloodless cost; though, I confess, it seems to me the fanaticism of credulity to suppose it could be so. He would have confronted with his mustering forces, Moses-like, this later Pharaoh, with

a "Thus saith the Lord, Let my people go;" an unresisting obedience to which mandate would doubtless, so far as *he* was concerned, have been followed by a peaceable retreat. That he would have employed or countenanced force, in recklessness or revenge, for aught but self-defence in humanity's cause, is, as the man has shown himself to us, a moral impossibility.

I believe in truth and love as the overcoming power of moral evil. I would not compromise my adhesion to this, as eminently the Christian rule, through my admiration of those, who, though from highest motives, for noblest ends, make use of aggressive force. But let us be consistent, and not condemn it in John Brown at Virginia, while we applaud it, as employed by great historic names, in other lands and our own, for ends no more worthy, that lifted to Heaven a far *less* beseeching appeal. Is it *success* gives merit to undertakings for human freedom? or the *theatre* whereon enacted? or the *race* in whose behalf? And let those, who are so ready to make use of Christ's teaching as ground for condemnation in the instance before us, remember that his precept of non-resistance is not his only one; that he had something to say about *love and duty to one's neighbor*; that he commended especially to our imitation him who found his "neighbor" in the man who had "*fallen among thieves*," and staid to bless him, though priest and Levite passed.

I pass from the man and the deed to the event, as a distinct source of instruction and impression.

And, first, it yields new and more convincing proofs of the diabolicalness of that "institution," which demands, in order to its safety, its existence, the death of the bravely true, the morally heroic ; which dares not pardon such, dares not imprison merely, dares not delay the fatal end, but must straightway kill : or, to put it in another form, that system which demands for its support laws against which the natural conscience, the religious sense, rebels ; which makes that treason which God makes duty, and counts those felons whom the universal heart calls heroes. Here is a man distinguished for his moral nobility, his love of truth, honor, justice, benevolence, — for his unshrinking fealty to these, — and Virginia hangs him. "He broke her laws." Yes, but only because the law of Eternal Justice was broken in their enactment ; because they stood between prostrate millions and the uplifting boon and birthright which the God within him yearned to give them. *Slavery* hung him. Of course it would. It can do nothing better with a true man, for its own interest's sake. What a condition of things has this affair caused a revelation of in the Slaveholding States ! What a condition of things to exist in one-half of a Christian republic ! Such fears of truth ; such suppression of honest speech ; where peace and safety can only be secured

by stifling — ay, below a whisper — the noblest sentiments of the soul ; where the Bible is regarded, and dealt with, as offensively incendiary, and can only be tolerated by covering up its golden rule, its parable of the good Samaritan, and its other humanities ! What a state of society, when a score of men, entering it at its borders, and asserting God's claim upon his stolen children, and going to work to enforce it, cause a panic of terror through an entire population, which every light upon the horizon, the most insignificant occurrence, renews and heightens, — a terror for what *they* may do, who, we are told, are so contented and happy, and gratefully attached ! Truly, one may well divide his pity between the slaveholder and the slave.

Again : the event gives new and startling proof of the instability of the social system built on slavery, — of slavery itself as an instituted power. Above what volcanic possibilities is the South seen to stand, — does *it* see itself to stand, — which may flame at any moment into dire realities ; the igniting sparks of truth flying in all the winds of heaven without, and vainly striven against lest they should light within ! The danger most fearful to the South, and most imminent, is not from abroad. Left to itself, — so far as the all-pervading spirit of the age *can* leave it, so far as any direct interference is concerned, — it is left with its worst enemy, in the elements self-

engendered in its own bosom. What may not be, when once those fettered millions know their might; when they know, as this event will help them to, the fact of an existing sympathy for them beyond their borders, but only just beyond, may be within, — a sympathy willing to peril life for their deliverance? What may not be, when that other element of danger (the non-slaveholders), seething in secret, none may know how hotly, — for it has no organ of expression to the world nor to itself, — when *this* element shall find vent in voice and deed, and know and use its now arrogantly despised power? It is idle to deny the fact of this insecurity and peril. It is seen by this occurrence as it had not been before. And was it not to be looked for, in the very nature of things, by the very ordinance of the Almighty? A system, social or civil, founded in injustice, — must it not bear within it the elements of rottenness and evil? Well may it be that the event under consideration has drawn attention anew to so grave a fact, has furnished new testimony to it; well for the South, — God grant it! — in its insane clinging to slavery as a good; well for the North, in its wicked complicity and irresolute paltering with so great a wrong.

Again: this event has shown the South, what it has seemed unable to conceive, that the opposition to slavery at the North is not the offspring of sectional hate or sentimental heat, of self-interest or passion,

but of a constraining principle, of a religiously-felt obligation. John Brown represents to them and to the world, in the inciting and pervading motive of his enterprise, the true grounds of that opposition, deep and abiding as the principles of rectitude and mercy. He had nothing to gain by it of an earthly sort, if he succeeded; every thing to lose, if he failed. There was no feeling of retaliation or revenge to be gratified. He was willing to sacrifice his all for those of whom he knew no more than that they were enslaved, towards whom he had no other relation than the human, whose claim on him was that alone of suffering and helplessness. The antislavery reform is a moral and religious one. The abolitionists have stood, from the beginning, — and it is this which has given a moral dignity and glory to their enterprise, lifting it far above all political movements, — they have stood on the essential and eternal right, and based their appeals on that to the conscience and the heart. Hence their success. Hence, whatever they have gained they have gained for ever. There is, there can be, no ebb to the on-sweeping tide of antislavery sentiment. How preposterous to think to stay it by politic deprecations, to think to bind it by constitutional compacts and judicial decisions! I tell you they shall be as stubble before its majestic swell.

Again: the event yields new illustration of the

vast superiority, in potential influence, of deeds to words. There have been torrents of speech — declamation, argument, persuasion, invective — levelled for years, in the Free States, against the slave-power. Nor has it been in vain. It was needed. It has wrought incalculable good. But here is one so terribly in earnest, so meaning what he says, that he *must act*; that, throwing himself unreservedly upon his principles, he *does* act; and does thus, whatever he fails to do, a work for freedom — so it would seem, viewed in its higher bearings — which years of words alone had failed to do. The lesson is not that such like deeds are to be repeated, or are in themselves right. By no means. But *this*, that *deeds*, *some* deeds, such as our avowed principles authorize and demand of us, should back our words, should prove our earnestness, would we be efficient instruments against the instituted iniquity of our land. This faithful servant of God put his life-swaying idea and feeling into that embodiment which seemed to and for him worthy and right and best; and has gained by it a success different from, but far beyond, all that he proposed to himself or hoped for. Obedience to a conviction, — self-sacrificing, *life*-sacrificing obedience, — it can shake even the citadel of American Slavery. *Life*-sacrificing, I say. What a power there is in blood, freely given and poured forth for a righteous end! They little knew, who heard it, the

profound significance, prophetically hidden, of that saying uttered in the Jewish Sanhedrim, with reference to him, the divine Emancipator, at whom it so blindly aimed, — “It is expedient for us that one man die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not.” *We* little know what sacred expediency may be yet shown to be involved in this recent dying; how much it may do, in the workings of a spiritual Providence, to save a nation’s perishing.

Friends, who can doubt that a crisis is approaching in the conflict, truly called “irrepressible,” between freedom and slavery, in our country? Let us feel that we each have an influence—however small, not unimportant—in the great decision; and let us employ it, as God may give the opportunities, in the true spirit of his Christ, for freedom, humanity, himself; putting a cheerful and untrembling faith in the overruling and righteous Providence.

“All is best; though we oft doubt  
 What the unsearchable dispose  
 Of highest Wisdom brings about,  
 And ever best found in the close.  
 Oft he seems to hide his face,  
 But unexpectedly returns,  
 And to his faithful champions, soon or late,  
 Bears witness gloriously.”





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